

## **Sin -What We Need to Know**

Pastor Joseph Clark – August 6, 2020

“When all is said and done, the life of faith is nothing if not an unending struggle of the spirit with every available weapon against the flesh.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

“So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

-James 4:17

This article is on sin. It does not contain everything there is to know about sin. If it did, it would be entire book. A very large book. And it is not on the topic of forgiveness and salvation, so before I get a bunch of nasty emails, be informed that forgiveness, saving grace, and salvation is covered in other articles. No. This article is about sin. What we need to know.

In the Old Testament, there are several words in Hebrew for sin. Each with its own meaning. For example, the word *pesha*, or "trespass" means a sin done out of rebelliousness. The word *aveira* translates to "transgression", the word *avone*, or "iniquity", means a sin committed out of moral failing. The most common translated word for "sin", *hata*, literally means "to go astray." In the New Testament, the Koine Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, which means "to miss the mark," Latin has an old present participle which came to mean "guilty". The root meaning would appear to be "*it is true*;" that is, "*the charge has been proven*." The word in English as we know it comes from the Old English “Synn”, and the word appears this way in several Germanic languages and Norse, and literally means “It is true”. The early church simply defined it by tradition as “an offense against God by despising His persons and Christian biblical law, and by injuring others”. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines sin as:

1a: an offense against religious or moral law

b: an action that is or is felt to be highly reprehensible - it is a sin to waste food

c: an often serious shortcoming : FAULT

2a: transgression of the law of God

b: a vitiated state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God

When asked, ‘What is the definition of sin?’ Billy Graham gave the following answer: *A sin is any thought or action that falls short of God’s will. God is perfect, and anything we do that falls short of His perfection is sin.*

Simply put, Sin is any offense to God. Sin puts our eternal soul at risk. Sin is applauded by Satan. Sin is committed through thought, word, or deed.

All sin is forgivable, but one, which is mentioned in Mark 3:28-30 and Matthew 12:31-32. Jesus had been performing signs, which included exorcising unclean spirits from people by way of the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of recognizing Jesus’s divinity and accepting Him as God’s Son, the religious leaders accused Him of being possessed by the devil, and of exorcising demons who obey him because he has the power of the devil.

Jesus responded by saying, “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.” Roughly translated, the sin of the religious leaders (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) was their refusal to accept the witness of the Holy Spirit about whom Jesus was, what He had come to do, and then submit their lives to Him.

God does not sin. Christ never sinned. We know this from God himself who speaks to us in The Word. Humans sin and Angels are capable of sin as well, should they choose not to love God. We know this, as a former Archangel, Lucifer, and those angels who followed him, sinned when they rebelled against God. God created all things. Including beings that sin. However, it would be rather obtuse to suggest that God created sin: sin results from the shortcomings of men and women abusing the freewill that God gifts to us.

The first sin was committed by Adam and Eve's rebellion in Eden, specifically the sin of disobedience in consuming the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is much debate about who was the first human being to sin. Was it Eve for dialogue with the serpent and disobeying God’s instructions about eating the fruit? Or was it Adam for going along with it and eating the fruit with Eve? In any event Adam and Eve were the first human sinners.

In the Old Testament, God punished His children through different penalties for their varying sins, suggesting that He Himself recognizes variations in the seriousness of some sins. A thief paid restitution; an occult practitioner was disgraced and cut off from Israel; one who committed adultery, homosexuality, or cursed his parents was sentenced and executed. (see Exodus, chapter 22 and Leviticus, chapter 20).

In the New Testament, Jesus said it would be more bearable on the day of judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum because of Capernaum's unbelief and refusal to repent after witnessing His signs (Matthew 11:23-24). The sins of Sodom were identified in Ezekiel 16:49-50 as "arrogance, gluttony, indifference to the poor and needy, haughtiness, and detestable things."

When Jesus preached about His second coming and judgment, He warned that among those deserving punishment there would be some who would "be beaten with many blows" and others "with few blows" (Luke 12:47-48). He also reserved His most fierce denunciations for the pride and unbelief of the religious leaders, not the sexually immoral (Matthew 23:13-36). So, the question is not so much, is one sin greater than another? But rather, why do the punishments vary? And what will the punishment be, based on the sin?

Rest assured that whether our sins are big or small, they will place us in Hell apart from God's grace, and Jesus paid the penalty for our sins at the Cross. If we will repent and turn to Jesus in faith, our sins will be forgiven, and we will receive the gift of eternal life. In the Old Testament, God made His laws known. If you broke them, you were sinning. However, Jesus brought a new covenant and He made it clear that there is a new standard that is much higher to sin. Not only are you sinning through deed, but also through words and thoughts. If you lust after a woman with your eyes and heart, you are committing adultery. If you are angry with your brother and sister, you are committing murder. In other words, there is no way that we can remain sin-free. We are not capable of avoiding sin. The only way to be saved is through Christ.

God is aware when we struggle with sin. He is also aware if we indulge in sin. As saved Christians, we are a new creation in Christ. There is an interesting relationship between God's sovereignty and human freewill. The Apostle Paul complained, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15, ESV). We all wrestle with sin. Once we are saved, as part of our sanctification we become acutely aware of our sin. We loathe our sin. When we sin, we are remorseful and ashamed. This is part of our

repentance, and it is normal. Beware of those who will preach that we need not repent or confess our sins. As James, the brother of Jesus wrote, “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15, ESV). Even though we are born again, it is not an insurance policy or a get-out-of-jail-free card. We are responsible for our actions.

As John wrote, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9, ESV).

Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (ESV)

He also writes:

“Yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things — things that belong to salvation” (Hebrews 6:9).

If you are struggling with sin and you have doubts and fears about your standing with God, then you are likely not guilty of rejecting Christ. If you were guilty of rejecting Christ, you would not be worried about it.

Can we be unsaved? No. Can we manifest never being saved in the first place? Yes. If we indulge in sin with apathy for God and a lack of remorse for that sin if we consider our salvation a get-out-of-jail-free card and behave as such. There are those who stand at the front of an altar, announce that they received Christ, go

through Baptism, and then a year later they reject Christ and move onto Yoga, or Transcendental Meditation, or whatever their next fad or fixation is. In this case they were not likely truly saved. They were not truly born-again.

The Bible is full of verses from both Christ and His Apostles in which we are instructed as saved Christians to avoid sin at all cost. To continue to repent and confess our sins. We glorify God any time that we resist temptation and refuse to sin.

The Holy Spirit tells us in the Word:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (James 5:16)

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1John 1:7)

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13)

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” (Proverbs 28:30)

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

“And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7:20-23)

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1John 1:9)

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” (James 1:14)

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16)

“All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.” (1 John 5:17)

The question that we must ask ourselves is, when we sin, are we aware of it? To what extent are we indulging in sin versus struggling with sin?

There is a movement in Christian circles which has been tagged “hyper grace”. Hyper grace preachers vary in their message ranging from a liberal belief that since our sins past, present, and future are covered by the saving grace of Christ, that our wrong doings are no longer “sins”; to, we no longer need to repent or confess our sins; to God does not recognize our wrongdoings as sin as we are saved already; and more. Other hyper grace preachers claim that the Lord’s Prayer along with much of Christ’s teachings became no longer relevant after He was crucified. Some hyper grace Christians are extremely sensitive and vocal against any message which suggests that we need to live in accordance with the Word, that we should perform deeds as Christ and the Apostles instructed, that we still need to repent after we have been saved, that we still need to confess our sins after we have been saved, or that sanctification is an ongoing process, etc. Hyper grace Christians have been very outspoken with their view that any traditional message and doctrine is “legalistic and oppressive.” Personally speaking, I would rather be accused of being overly protective of God’s Word than to “fall short” of God’s expectations based on an interpretation of the Bible that just came on the scene. A healthy fear of sin is a good thing. After all, we are talking about the betterment of our eternal souls, which is not to be taken lightly. The Bible can be misinterpreted and taken out of context by those who are looking for salvation without having to carry a cross on behalf of

Christ. The equivalent is those who wish to lose weight without the discomfort of diet and exercise, or those who wish to get rich without the discomfort of work.

I am the proud father of four beautiful people, my two daughters and my two sons. I remember a particular day when my son Ethan was age six or even. He had fallen short of something that was expected of him. I was quite frustrated, and disappointed with him, and disappointed for him at the same time. He looked at me with concern and embarrassment, and he asked, “Dad, are you still proud of me?” I opened my mouth to vent my exasperation to him, and all that came out was, “Son...always.” You see, God was in control of my words at that moment. Thankfully. I was annoyed with my son, but I saw that he was fearful that he had disappointed me. He was experiencing remorse. At that moment my annoyance was replaced with images in my mind of the many times that Ethan would be accomplishing something -riding a bike for the first time, breaking a board at Tae Kwon Do, swimming to the raft at the cottage, playing soccer- and he would constantly be looking over his shoulder at me with that look in his eyes that said ‘I am doing it Dad! Do you see me, Dad?’ It was I who had fallen short. Not Ethan. Thankfully, the love of God the Father guided my tongue. “Son...always.”

And by the way, Ethan. I saw you every time, and I still see you, and I am proud of you...always.

This is how the Lord sees us. We wish to celebrate Him through our deeds. We know that we are not saved by our deeds, but we glorify Him and celebrate Him through our deeds and devotions. As we do, we say “Do you see me, Lord? Are you proud of me, Lord?” When we sin, we say “I feel awful about this, Lord, I am sorry, Father. Do you forgive me?” And we know that the answer is “My child...always.”

“Only when we understand the holiness of God will we understand the depth of our sin.”

- Billy Graham

It is not enough to want to get rid of one's sins, we also need to believe in the One who saves us from our sins.

- C.S Lewis

The cross of Christ only triumphs in the breast of believers over the devil and the flesh, sin, and sinners, when their eyes are directed to the power of His Resurrection.

- John Calvin

Either sin is with you, lying on your shoulders, or it is lying on Christ, the Lamb of God. Now if it is lying on your back, you are lost; but if it is resting on Christ, you are free, and you will be saved. Now choose what you want.

- Martin Luther

“The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.”

- Dwight L. Moody

“Sin is more than a stain. Sin is a wound; it needs to be treated, healed. The place where my encounter with the mercy of Jesus takes place is my sin.”

- Pope Francis

Here are some important facts about sin that it is healthy for us to reflect on:

Unintentional sin is still sin.

Leviticus 4:2 "Say to the Israelites: `When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands-- (NIV)



Simply put, failure to do what is right is sin.

James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)

God can bring good out of sin and frequently does.

Genesis 45:4-8 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt." (NIV)

Although Joseph's brothers wanted to get rid of him (Genesis 37:26-36), God's plan was being fulfilled through their evil actions.

It is difficult to see our own faults. Therefore, we should pray for God to point them out to us. Like 6:41 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (NIV)

God points out our areas of weakness through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit as well as through His word. It is righteous to ask God to search our hearts for hidden sins that we may not be aware of. Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. (NIV)

If we confess our sins, God will forgive us. 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (NIV) This verse does not refer to confessing our sins to avoid judgement. The Bible teaches that Christians will not be condemned for their sins. However, we will all be judged. John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in

the name of God's one and only Son. (NIV) But rather the verse is emphasizing confessing our sins so that our fellowship with God can be restored. 1 John 1:6-8 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (NIV)

When all else fails, how can we know that we are sinning? At one time all that men and women had was the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. However, the Bible is chocked full of examples of sin:

“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.”  
(Mark 7:21-22 ESV).

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”  
(Galatians 5:19-21 ESV).

“...Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”  
(1Corinthians 6:9-10 ESV).

“...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine”  
(1Timothy 1:9-10 ESV).

“Outside [the city of God] are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”  
(Revelation 21:8 ESV).

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire...”  
(Revelation 22:15 ESV).

The encouraging news is this. When the Holy Spirit speaks to us in the word, and tells us in Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30, and Deuteronomy 6:5, “Thou shalt love thy Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”. Anything less than this is falling short of the mark and therefore is sin. Why is this encouraging? Because it is very non-complex to understand what sin is, in order for us to do our best to recognize it, avoid it, and acknowledge it in ourselves and confess it.

Jesus Christ died for our sins; He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. When John the Baptist baptised Christ at Jesus’s own insistence, our sin was placed on Him as the sacrificial lamb, and when He died on the cross the sacrifice was complete. He paid the price for our salvation. If we choose in our hearts to receive Him as our Lord and Savior in accordance with the Word of God, our faith and His grace is our salvation from eternal damnation. However, let us not make the mistake in believing that we will not still stand judgement. The Bible says that we will:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10.

As we did with our own fathers. While we are supremely confident in their love for us, a fear of angering or disappointing them was a healthy thing. It is so with God that much more.

I wish to close with the following writing of Pastor John Stephen Piper.

“What is sin?

It is the glory of God not honored.

The holiness of God not revered.

The greatness of God not admired.

The power of God not praised.

The truth of God not sought.

The wisdom of God not esteemed.

The beauty of God not treasured.

The goodness of God not savored.

The faithfulness of God not trusted.

The commandments of God not obeyed.

The justice of God not respected.

The wrath of God not feared.

The grace of God not cherished.

The presence of God not prized.

The person of God not loved.

That is sin.”

— John Piper

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